

Sunday, April 27, 2014

2nd Sunday of Easter (A)

Conventual Mass

The Mercy of the Lord Endures Forever

On April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized Sr. Faustina Kowalska, and officially established the second Sunday of Easter as the Sunday of Divine Mercy.

Throughout the Scriptures, God is characterized by love, compassion, and mercy. When Moses went up Mt. Sinai, “The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6). This portrayal of God appears again and again in Scriptures. The Hebrew word *hesed* which is usually translated by the English word “mercy” is rich in meanings. Used with *emet* it denotes the quality which makes another dependable and worthy of faith. *Hesed* can mean something a person does from generosity not from obligation. In judgment it conceives of the judge not as an arbiter but as a deliverer and with the will to save. When God’s *hesed* is associated with the covenant, God’s *hesed* is conditional on the fidelity of Israel. God’s mercy is infinite but it also demands conversion and reform.¹

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Hb 1:1) so begins the Letter to the Hebrews. In the Word made flesh the love, compassion and mercy of God became visible, tangible. Jesus’ miracles and signs, his teachings and parables

proclaim to all the world the mercy and love of God for the human race. Above all is this evident in Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, the total self-giving of God for our salvation. This is not simply the retelling of an historical event; it is of the utmost importance to us. For we are called not only to share in the Lord's cross and death. We are called to rise again with Jesus, transfigured as he was, and to share in his glory. He is the first of many brethren, "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). The Scriptures were written for us.

The two accounts of the appearances of the resurrected Jesus begin in darkness. Mary Magdalene set out for the tomb in the dark. In the passage we read today it is the evening of the same day and the disciples are locked in out of fear. Darkness used so often by St. John to symbolize unbelief and evil is here illuminated by the presence of the risen Christ. Although the disciples had heard the witness of Mary Magdalene, they were still incredulous. And now, incredulity battled with reality. The wounds Jesus showed them proved it was he, the crucified one. Awe stricken, beside themselves with joy they gathered around him.

"Peace!" was his first word to them. Was it perhaps a word of absolution spoken to the assembled disciples who in the midst of their joy remembered how they had betrayed him? Peace and reconciliation was his Easter gift to them, a peace unlike any other, a peace only he could give. It was a peace that grounded them in divine love and mercy.

After Jesus showed them his wounds, he offered his disciples peace a second time. This time peace was the power to continue Christ's mission. The disciples received divine life and love through the open wounds of Christ. However, divine life cannot be possessed; it can only be given away. Therefore they were immediately commissioned by him even as he was commissioned by the Father and through them to whomever they in turn would commission.ⁱⁱ

The key to their mission is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Just as God breathed life into clay, so Jesus breathed on his disciples, making of them a new creation. The work of the Holy Spirit is to make things one, and the path to this unity is through the forgiveness of sin. Sin separates us from God and one another. Jesus has taken away the sin of the world and replaced it with communion. Forgiveness and forgiving one another is the condition for unity.ⁱⁱⁱ Through the forgiveness of sins, the sacrament of Reconciliation, the church continues Jesus' work of salvation and divine mercy.

From the diary of a Polish sister, St. Faustina Kowalska, a special devotion to the mercy of God has spread throughout the world. The message is nothing new, just a reminder of what the church has always taught: that God is merciful and forgiving and that we too must show mercy and forgiveness. In this devotion we are called to a deeper understanding that God's love is unlimited and available to everyone – especially the greatest sinner.^{iv}

Liturgically the octave of Easter has always centered on the theme of God's love and mercy. Among all the elements of devotion to the Divine Mercy asked for by our Lord through St. Faustina the Feast of Mercy holds the first place. In one of the revelations Jesus made to Sr. Faustina, Jesus told her: "I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and a shelter for all souls, and especially for poor sinners. On that day the very depths of my tender mercy are open. I pour out a whole ocean of graces upon those souls who approach the font of mercy."

"The soul that will go to confession and receive Holy Communion shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment. On that day are opened all the divine floodgates through which graces flow. Let no soul fear to draw near to me, even though his sins be as scarlet."^v

But just as we receive mercy, so we must show mercy. In another revelation, Jesus told Sr. Faustina: "I demand from you deeds of mercy which are to arise out of love for me. You are to show mercy to your neighbors always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or to try to excuse yourself from it."^{vi} What we have been freely given we are to give to others.

Closely associated with this devotion and this feast is the image of Jesus, Divine Mercy himself. It is a visible reminder of all that he did for us in his passion, death, and resurrection – and what he asks of us – to trust him and be merciful to others. Those who venerate it are promised victory over the forces of

darkness especially at the hour of death. Two rays issue from the heart of Jesus.

The white ones stand for the water which makes souls righteous and the red stand for his blood, the life of the soul.

The image represents the graces of divine mercy poured out upon the world, especially through Baptism and the Eucharist.^{vii}

Divine Mercy Sunday is not a new feast celebrating St. Faustina's revelations. The second Sunday of Easter was already a solemnity as the octave day of Easter. Nevertheless, the title "Divine Mercy" does amplify the meaning of the day. In this way, it recovers an ancient liturgical tradition, reflected in a teaching attributed to St. Augustine about the Easter Octave, which he called "the days of mercy and pardon," and the octave day itself "a compendium of the days of mercy."^{viii}

Endnotes

i" John L. McKenzie, Dictionary of the Bible (Milwaukee, Bruce, 1965)) 565,566

ii" John Shea, The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers, v. 4(Collegeville, Minn., Liturgical Press, 2004) 157

iii" John Shea, 158

iv" Seraphim Michalenko, The Divine Mercy Message and Devotion (Stockbridge, Ma., Marian Press, 2008) 8,9

v" Seraphim Michalenko, 48.

vi" Seraphim Michalenko, 29.

vii" Seraphim Michalenko, 46, 47

viii" <http://the-divinemercury.org/mercysunday/dms.php>